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THE HARD-OF-HEARING CHILD IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM



SPECIAL SERVICES BRANCH
Department of Education
EDMONTON, ALBERTA
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Perhaps in Your Class -

Throughout the province there are known to be a number of hard-of-hearing children attending school in regular classes. Not unreasonably, their teachers may feel that such children should be in special classes or special schools rather than in the regular classroom. Certainly, it has been found that for some children with quite severe hearing losses, including the profoundly deaf, special classes are highly desirable. But there are problems of geography and transportation which make it quite unlikely that special facilities can be made available to all hearing-handicapped children.

Moreover, the opinion is widely held amongst educators of handicapped children that segregation into special classes should only be effected if it is essential, and that much is to be gained by having the handicapped child in the regular class with "normal" children. Of course, his presence there will raise problems for the teacher. His acceptance by the other children will depend very largely on his acceptance by the teacher. His progress in school will depend in part on the degree to which the teacher understands and adapts to his handicap. The purpose of this brochure is to help the teacher to understand and meet the problems presented by the hearing-handicapped child.

Recognizing the Handicap

Impaired hearing has been aptly referred to as a "hidden handicap": a child can be suffering from a hearing loss and we may never suspect it. Defective eyesight, crippling conditions, and the more severe forms of mental retardation are apparent to even the casual observer at an early age, but hearing handicaps are not likely to be so obvious. A child with hearing impairment is commonly and wrongly judged to be unco-operative, disinterested, or dull when he cannot hear what is being said to him. His teachers may conclude that he is stupid when he is unable to understand them. His behavior is frequently misunderstood and invites impatience, scolding, or despair rather than understanding and help.

Naturally the effects of a hearing loss will vary with the degree and type of loss and with the age at which the loss was incurred. A hearing loss, even a fairly severe one, which begins when the child possesses already well established speech may be less serious than a less severe loss which has existed from birth. Even a slight hearing impairment, however, can adversely affect the child in a number of ways. Most obviously his speech development may not be normal. Certain types of high frequency defects affect the child's ability to hear sounds such as



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s, v, t, p, k, th, and f and contribute to articulation defects. Such losses make it difficult for the child to distinguish accurately between words. It is the author's conjecture that these and other hearing losses will make a marked and adverse affect on the development of vocabulary and language patterns. The effects may be cumulative, leading to retardation in reading comprehension and in many other areas of school work.

Because the effects can be so wide spread it is important that any suspected hearing loss be investigated thoroughly by a medical specialist as early as possible. The teacher should be aware of various signs of possible hearing impairment. Amongst these are certain obvious symptoms:

1. Frequently asking a person to repeat a statement.
2. Turning the ear to one side to listen or cupping the ear with one hand.
3. Leaning forward to listen.
4. Conditions leading to hearing loss: ear ache, running ear, chronic colds.

However, not every child with a hearing loss will show these symptoms and the teacher should be aware of other more subtle ones such as the following:

5. Ability to understand the speaker better when watching his face.
6. Inattention when spoken to in a normal voice.
7. Frequent misunderstanding of directions or requests.
8. Poor speech development, mispronunciations, slurring or omitting certain sounds.
9. Being unusually tired after a session of listening to others talk and at the end of a school day.
10. A tendency to avoid activities in groups and to play alone much or most of the time.
11. Failure in the language subjects, especially reading, spelling, and oral work with an unusual voice pitch, often high and with little inflection.
12. General failure in school.

These should be regarded not as proof of a hearing loss but as warning signs. They indicate the need for prompt examination of the child by a medical expert. The Pre-School Deaf Clinic, University of Alberta Hospital, Edmonton, provides a free diagnostic service for children up to age five or six who have suspected hearing loss. The parents should be advised to arrange with their physician for an examination as soon as possible.

What the Teacher Can Do

The following are suggestions for the instruction of the hard-of-hearing child in your class.

1. Seat the child near the front of the room, with his better ear toward you ... you need to think in terms of the position in the room from which most of your directions are given.
2. Get as close to the child as much as possible when you speak to the class. Try to give important instructions from a position in front of the child.
3. Encourage the child to watch your face when you talk to the class.
4. Stand where sufficient light falls on your face so that your lips can easily be read. Avoid standing with your back to the light ... this causes shadows on your face and makes it difficult for the child to look into the glare behind you.
5. Encourage the child to turn to see the faces of the children participating in class activities. When children recite, direct the attention of the class to the child who is speaking so that the hard-of-hearing child will not feel conspicuous as he turns to listen and watches what is said.
6. Avoid using low tones or exaggerated lip movements ... this tends to distort your speech. The child depends upon lipreading for some understanding and he needs to see your lips move naturally.
7. Avoid the use of gestures when you talk to the child. Encourage him to express himself orally.
8. Encourage the child to speak clearly. A hearing loss extending over a period of time tends to result in a dull voice and inaccurate diction. Encourage participation in music, especially vocal music ... this will help to improve the tone and rhythm of his speech.
9. Convince the child to wear his hearing aid in all activities except sports and strenuous games ... this will enrich his experiences with sound. Let the child, if he will, tell the class about his hearing aid and why he has to wear it. When he can discuss it freely with his peers, he will have gained the confidence to wear it.
10. Provide active participation in all language activities which include reading and spelling ... a hearing loss affects the language process and such participation will provide compensation. Where possible, use diagrams or illustrations to clarify the exact meaning of certain words and phrases.
11. Remember that the child is using more effort to hear than the hearing child. It may be expected that it will be hard to hold his interest. He will show signs of fatigue more quickly than a normal child. This will be evidenced by extreme pallor, inattention, emotional patterns such as tears, ill temper, or an inclination to withdraw and daydream.

12. The child should be encouraged to attempt all assignments. He should never be excused because of his speech or hearing difficulties. Patience and understanding on the part of the class and teacher are necessary, and the child's attempts must be encouraged and accepted.
13. Watch carefully to see that the child is not withdrawing from the group or that he is not suffering a personal reaction as a direct result of his impairment. A hearing loss may result in emotional strain due to undeserved scoldings, insults, crude jokes or ridicule. (He needs to understand what you or others want him to do.) Tell the children in his group about speech and hearing problems and the value of the hearing aid.
14. Warn the child personally in case of emergency because he may not have heard the warning signal.
15. Ask the parents to tutor the child at home in subjects which are difficult for him. You may not have time to give him all the assistance that he needs. Keep the parents informed as to their child's needs in this matter and gain their understanding of their responsibility in his education. If the parents are not able to help, recommend that they obtain a tutor. (Language in all forms is usually more difficult for the hard-of-hearing child than for the normal child. It is for these assignments as well as for speech that the child may need the assistance of a tutor.)
16. Enlist the co-operation of the other members of the class in helping the child by explaining to them, in his absence, his limitations, how he wants to be one of the group, and how they can help him. For example, the teacher might appoint one or two brighter members of the class to act as tutors when the teacher is busy. The child can get notes and assignments (if they have been missed) from the student "tutors".
17. Follow carefully any suggestions made by a special teacher who may be teaching the child in the areas such as speech and speech-reading.
18. Be especially vigilant in noting common colds, influenza, or throat infections. They need to be given medical attention as soon as possible.
19. Encourage the testing of the child's hearing at least once a year. This will determine whether or not he has a progressive loss.

(Alberta School for the Deaf, Edmonton)

What the Parents Can Do

Twenty Seven Do's

1. Do let him know that you have confidence and pride in him.
2. Do let him see that his whole family loves and needs him.
3. Do treat him as if you expected him to speak, and know he understands you when it is obvious he does.
4. Do make a game of playing with him and let him watch your face when you talk.
5. Do make a game out of playing in front of a mirror so that he can enjoy watching you in imitating facial movements.
6. Do give him a chance to grow up and take some responsibilities.
7. Do read to him and show him pictures.
8. Do talk to him and ask others to do so too.
9. Do give him a chance to develop his special activities and interests.
10. Do talk to him in a normal voice and in full sentences.
11. Do expect from him what is socially within his age and mental level.
12. Let him do alone the things he can do; this gives him self-confidence.
13. Do help him when you are teaching him to help himself.
14. Do use encouraging, positive and specific directions to elicit desirable conduct.
15. Do stress success.
16. Do cooperate with the doctor, the health authorities, the educational specialist, the teacher and the principal of the school.
17. Do teach him obedience.
18. Do talk to him more and more, not less and less.
19. Do have patience and time and effort.
20. Do explain painstakingly the most vital occurrences of everyday life in the home.
21. No matter how small the residuum, do make use of the remaining hearing which he may possess. It is invaluable in learning language, acquiring speech elements and in regulating pitch and placement of the voice.

7. Don't begin immediately to train his eyes to substitute for his ears, or to forget about the concept of hearing.
8. Avoid the light rays when you are talking to him; light on your back throws shadows on your face and makes lipreading difficult.
9. Remember on his part is his and what is yours.
10. Do keep a daily record of his activities.
11. Don't talk into his ear to store up auditory impressions which will someday help the mastery of speech by oral methods.
12. Remember now you think he is a fine and important person.

Twenty One Don't's

1. Don't listen to the neighbors and relatives when they say thoughtless things about your child.
2. Don't feel you must apologize for him.
3. Don't keep him away from other children because he has no speech and doesn't hear as well as they do. They may be the best teachers.
4. Don't let his handicap worry you too much. He will sense your anxiety and worry too.
5. Don't forget that Father is an important person in the child's life, too.
6. Don't compare him with his brothers and sisters or with the neighbor's children.
7. Don't blame yourself, but start now to try to help him.
8. Don't let any member of the family "baby" him.
9. Don't be afraid to let him grow up and develop in other ways like any other child.
10. Don't shout at him. Talk in a natural voice close to his ear. Your voice will be much louder to him than you think.
11. Don't talk in single words. He probably understands more than you give him credit for.
12. Don't wait on him "hand and foot".
13. Don't exaggerate your lip movements. This makes speech harder to understand.
14. Don't correct every word he uses; accept and encourage his speech.
15. Don't expect his development to be spasmodic; development is continuous.

16. Don't be his greatest handicap.
17. Don't speak at him. Speak with him.
18. Don't waste time and energy bemoaning the fact of the loss of hearing.
19. Don't threaten him.
20. Don't be negativistic; try to build on the thing he achieves.
21. Don't display "dead pan" when you talk to him. Make him think you are more interested in talking to him than anything else you could do.

(from the Ohio Chronicle, October, 1959)

Note: Photograph on cover courtesy Edmonton Journal.

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